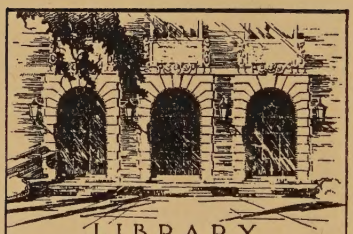
SONGS FROM THE CLAY

By JAMES STEPHENS



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SONGS FROM THE CLAY

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TORONTO

SONGS FROM THE CLAY

BY

JAMES STEPHENS

AUTHOR OF
"THE HILL OF VISION," "THE CROCK OF GOLD"
"THE DEMI-GODS," ETC.

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SONGS FROM THE CLAY

AND IT WAS WINDY WEATHER

Now the winds are riding by,
Clouds are galloping the sky,
And the trees are lashing their
Leafy plumes upon the air;
They are crying as they sway —
"*Pull the roots out of the clay,*
Dance away, O, dance away;
Leave the rooted place and speed
To the hill-side and the mead,
To the roaring seas we go,
Chase the airy birds, and know,
Flying high, flying high,
All the freedom of the sky,
All the freedom of the sky."

THE RIVALS

I HEARD a bird at dawn
  Singing sweetly on a tree,
That the dew was on the lawn,
  And the wind was on the lea;
But I didn't listen to him,
  For he didn't sing to me.

I didn't listen to him,
  For he didn't sing to me
That the dew was on the lawn
  And the wind was on the lea;
I was singing at the time
  Just as prettily as he.

I was singing all the time,
  Just as prettily as he,

About the dew upon the lawn
  And the wind upon the lea;
So I didn't listen to him
  As he sang upon a tree.

THE MESSENGER

Bee! tell me whence do you come?
Ten fields away, twenty perhaps,
Have heard your hum.

If you are from the north, you may
Have passed my mother's roof of straw
Upon your way.

If you came from the south, you should
Have seen another cottage just
Inside the wood.

And should you go back that way, please
Carry a message to the house
Among the trees.

Say — I will wait her at the rock
Beside the stream, this very night
At eight o'clock.

And ask your queen when you get
home
To send my queen the present of
A honey-comb.

THE DAISIES

In the scented bud of the morning-O,
When the windy grass went rippling far,
I saw my dear one walking slow,
In the field where the daisies are.

We did not laugh and we did not speak
As we wandered happily to and fro;
I kissed my dear on either cheek,
In the bud of the morning-O.

A lark sang up from the breezy land,
A lark sang down from a cloud afar,
And she and I went hand in hand
In the field where the daisies are.

TO BE CONTINUED

I SMILED at the angry maid,
  And said that I did not care
Whether she went or stayed.

And she, going down the glade,
  Thought, "Now he will fall to
    prayer."
I smiled at the angry maid.

Indeed I was sore afraid;
  But I said it was her affair
Whether she went or stayed.

About her a nimbus rayed
  Where the sun made love to her hair.
I smiled at the angry maid.

And while, like a fool, I played,
I had not a smile to spare
Whether she went or stayed.

She in her youth arrayed!
I stolid and scant of hair!
I smiled at the angry maid
Whether she went or stayed.

A SONG FOR LOVERS

The moon is shining on the sea:
  Every night the moon looks down
Through the spaces quietly;
And no matter though I be
  In the houses of the town,
Something always says to me,
The moon is shining on the sea.

Along the boulevard I pace,
  Peeping up among the trees,
And I see her gentle face
  Looking through immensities;
And while I stare there comes to me
The distant murmur of the sea.

For they love each other well:
  All across the depth of space

They are reaching out their arms,
They are looking face to face;
The pretty, timid moon and the
Poor, unhappy, little sea.

THE HORNED MOON

The heavens were silent and bare,
Not a star lit the heights overhead,
There was not a stir in the air,
And the people were all gone to bed.

I was there all alone in the night,
With the moon, and we talked for a while,
And her face was a wonder of light,
And her smile was a beautiful smile.

She leaned down and I nearly went mad
(And she was as frightened as me),
But I got the kiss that she had
Intended to give to the sea.

Then the sea gave a leap of surprise,
And shouted that she was a jade,
So the moon ran away through the skies,
And I hid myself in the glade.

After that we were never alone,
We were watched day and night, and they tied
The unhappy young moon to her throne,
Till I married a different bride.

IN WOODS AND MEADOWS

Play to the tender stops, though cheerily:
Gently my soul, my song: let no one hear:
Sing to thyself alone; thine ecstasy
Rising in silence to the inward ear
That is attuned to silence: do not tell
A friend, a bird, a star, lest they should say —
He danced in woods and meadows all the day,
Waving his arms, and cried as evening fell,
"O, do not come," and cried, "O, come, thou queen,
And walk with me unwatched upon the green
Under the sky."

DEIRDRE

Do not let any woman read this verse;
It is for men, and after them their sons
And their sons' sons.

The time comes when our hearts sink utterly;
When we remember Deirdre and her tale,
And that her lips are dust.

Once she did tread the earth: men took her hand;
They looked into her eyes and said their say,
And she replied to them.

More than a thousand years it is since she
Was beautiful: she trod the waving grass;
She saw the clouds.

A thousand years! The grass is still the same,
The clouds as lovely as they were that time
When Deirdre was alive.

But there has never been a woman born
Who was so beautiful, not one so beautiful
Of all the women born.

Let all men go apart and mourn together;
No man can ever love her; not a man
Can ever be her lover.

No man can bend before her: no man
say —
What could one say to her? There
are no words
That one could say to her!

Now she is but a story that is told
Beside the fire! No man can ever be
The friend of that poor queen.

THE PETAL OF A ROSE

Let us be quiet for a while,
The morrow comes: let us be still:
Let us close our eyes and smile,
Knowing that the morrow will
Come as certain as the sun
Or a sorrow: let us be
Peaceful till this night be done,
And we waken up to see
That the thing is not in view,
That the memory is gone,
And the world is made anew
Different for every one:
Different! The morrow glows
Where the black wings spread and brood,
Where the petal of a rose
Blushes in the solitude.

SWEET APPLE

(*After Sappho*)

At the end of the bough, at the top
of the tree
(As fragrant, as high, and as lovely
as thou!),
One sweet apple reddens which all
men may see
At the end of the bough.

Swinging full to the view, though the
gatherers now
Pass, and evade, overlook busily:
Overlook! nay, but pluck it!
They cannot tell how.

For it swings out of reach as a cloud, and as free
As a star, or thy beauty, which seems too, I vow,
Remote as the sweet rosy apple — ah me!
At the end of the bough.

THE RED-HAIRED MAN

But what is it that I have done to
you:
Why did you go away so suddenly:
Is it that I am ugly: is it true
That I am very ugly: did you see
Me peeping like a satyr through a
tree:
Was it my ugly face that frightened
you?

Was it my ugly face, say, was it so:
Was it my figure, tell me, am I
lame:
Do I go hopping like a wounded crow
Under a hedge: come, speak to me,
my dame!

Or have you heard of me an evil
fame:
Is that the reason why you had to go?

You had to go! Or did you go for
fun,
To see if I would come and search
for you?
If it be thus, behold! the game is
done,
For I am seeking, calling, torn in
two,
Lost and bewildered! what am I
to do
To bring you back again, my hope,
my sun!

My hope, my sun, my only thing of
true:
My promise and my treasure, my
delight:
My inmost, secret dream that no one
knew:

My sun that shines upon me in the night:
My moon that looks at me when day is bright:
What is it, then, that I have done to you?

THE SATYR

THERE came a satyr creeping through the wood,
His hair fell on his breast, his legs were slim:
His eyes were laughing wickedly, he stood
And peeped about on every side of him.

He peeped about, he minced upon the ground,
He put a thin hand up to hide a grin:
He doubled up and laughed without a sound;
The very bodiment of happy sin.

The bodiment of sin: timid and wild
And limber as a goat: his pointed feet
Were not at peace an instant: like a child
He danced and glanced, and like a goat was fleet.

He danced, he peeped, but at a sound I made,
A crackling twig, he turned and suddenly
In three great jumps he bounded to the shade,
And disappeared among the greenery.

THE GOAT PATHS

The crooked paths go every way
  Upon the hill — they wind about
  Through the heather in and out
Of the quiet sunniness.
And there the goats, day after day,
  Stray in sunny quietness,
Cropping here and cropping there,
  As they pause and turn and pass,
Now a bit of heather spray,
  Now a mouthful of the grass.

In the deeper sunniness,
  In the place where nothing stirs,
Quietly in quietness,
  In the quiet of the furze,
For a time they come and lie
Staring on the roving sky.

If you approach they run away,
  They leap and stare, away they
    bound,
  With a sudden angry sound,
To the sunny quietude;
  Crouching down where nothing
    stirs
  In the silence of the furze,
Couching down again to brood
In the sunny solitude.

If I were as wise as they
  I would stray apart and brood,
I would beat a hidden way
Through the quiet heather spray
  To a sunny solitude;
And should you come I'd run away,
  I would make an angry sound,
  I would stare and turn and bound
To the deeper quietude,
  To the place where nothing stirs
  In the silence of the furze.

In that airy quietness
I would think as long as they;
Through the quiet sunniness
I would stray away to brood
By a hidden beaten way
In a sunny solitude.

I would think until I found
Something I can never find,
Something lying on the ground,
In the bottom of my mind.

IN THE NIGHT

THERE always is a noise when it is dark;
It is the noise of silence and the noise
Of blindness.

The noise of silence and the noise of blindness
Do frighten me,
They hold me stark and rigid as a tree!

These frighten me,
These hold me stark and rigid as a tree!
Because at last their tumult is more loud
Than thunder.

Because at last
Their tumult is more loud than
thunder:
They terrify my soul,
They tear my heart asunder!

THE EARTH GODS

The gods are on the mountain, they
  Have sat together in a ring
For a night and for a day
  Talking over everything.

Talking over many things.
  All the gods are sitting there,
And from every forehead springs
  A fiery plume upon the air.

Forty feet into the air
  The flames are roaring, and the sky
Meets the marble brows of care,
  As they talk of you and I.

While they talk of you and I
  Do not make a sound, be still,
Hide among the leaves and fly
  From the gods upon the hill.

HESPERUS

(*After Sappho*)

Upon the sober sky thy robes are spread,
They drape the twilight, veil on quiet veil,
Until the lingering daylight all has fled
Before thee, modest goddess, shadow-pale:
The hushed and reverent sky
Her diadem of stars has lifted high.

The tender lamb, the bleating kid, the fawn,
All that the sunburnt day has scattered wide,

Thou dost regather, holding till the dawn
Each flower and tree and beast unto thy side:
The sheep come to the pen,
The dreams come to the men,
And to the mother's breast
The tired child doth come and take his rest.

Evening gathers everything
Scattered by the morning,
Fold for sheep and nest for wing,
Evening gathers everything,
Child to mother, queen to king
Running at thy warning;
Evening gathers everything
Scattered by the morning.

A TUNE ON A REED

I

I HAVE a pipe of oaten straw,
  I play upon it when I may,
And the music that I draw
  Is as happy as the day.

It has seven holes, and I
  Play upon it high and low;
I can make it laugh and cry,
  I can make it banish woe.

Any tune you like to name
  I will play it at the word,
Old or new is all the same,
  I'm as ready as a bird.

No one pipes so happily,
  Not a piper can succeed
When I lean against a tree
  Blowing gently on my reed.

II

But there is a tune, and though
I try to play it day and night,
Blowing high and blowing low,
I can never get it right.

I know the tune without a flaw,
And yet that tune I cannot play
On my pipe of oaten straw,
Though I practise night and day.

It seems to me I never will
Play again the happy air
Which I heard upon a hill
When the Shee were dancing there.

Little pipe! be good to me!
And play the tune I want to play,
Or I will smash you on a tree,
And throw your wicked halves away.

THE MARKET

A MAN came to me at the fair
  And said, "If you've a poet's tongue
Tumble up and chant the air
  That the stars of morning sung.

"I'll pay you, if you sing it nice,
  A penny-piece." — I answered flat,
"Sixpence is the proper price
  For a ballad such as that."

But he stared and wagged his head,
  Growling as he passed along,
"Sixpence! well, I'll see you dead
  Before I pay that for a song."

I saw him buy three pints of stout
With the sixpence — dirty lout!

INDEPENDENCE

I GREW single and sure,
And I will not endure
That my mind should be seen
By the sage or the boor.

I will keep, if I can,
From each brotherly man:
The help of their hands
Is no part of my plan.

I will rise then and go
To the land of my foe,
For his scowl is the sun
That shall cause me to grow.

THE WILD MAN

WHERE the stars are singing high
In their mighty dwellings, I
Have a habitation too,
And I slip away from you,
In the night-time or the day,
And you don't know I'm away.

I can go out when I please,
I can soar upon a breeze,
I can dodge from any eye,
I can straddle on the sky,
I can run away and be
Gone while you are watching me.

Where the stars go shouting by
In the heavens, there am I,
Leaping like a goat upon
Jupiter and Orión:
Then what do I care for thee
Who are always watching me.

THE TWINS

Good and bad are in my heart,
  But I cannot tell to you
(For they never are apart)
  Which is stronger of the two.

I am this, I am the other,
And the devil is my brother.
But my father He is God,
And my mother is the sod;
Therefore, I am safe, you see,
Owing to my pedigree.

So I shelter love and hate
  Like twin brothers in a nest,
Lest I find when it's too late
  That the other was the best.

THE WASTE PLACES

I

As a naked man I go
  Through the desert sore afraid,
Holding up my head, although
  I am as frightened as a maid.

The couching lion there I saw
  From barren rocks lift up his eye,
He parts the cactus with his paw,
  He stares at me as I go by.

He would follow on my trace
  If he knew I was afraid,
If he knew my hardy face
  Hides the terrors of a maid.

In the night he rises, and
He stretches forth, he snuffs the air,
He roars and leaps along the sand,
He creeps and watches everywhere.

His burning eyes, his eyes of bale
Through the darkness I can see;
He lashes fiercely with his tail,
He would love to spring at me.

I am the lion in his lair,
I am the fear that frightens me,
I am the desert of despair,
And the nights of agony.

Night or day, whate'er befall,
I must walk that desert land,
Until I can dare to call
The lion out to lick my hand.

II

As a naked man I tread
The gloomy forests, ring on ring,
Where the sun that's overhead
Cannot see what's happening.

There I go: the deepest shade,
The deepest silence pressing me,
And my heart is more afraid
Than a maiden's heart would be.

Every day I have to run
Underneath the demon tree,
Where the ancient wrong is done,
While I shrink in agony.

There the demon held a maid
In his arms, and as she, daft,
Screamed again in fear he laid
His lips upon her lips and laughed.

And she beckoned me to run,
  And she called for help to me.
And the ancient wrong was done
  Which is done eternally.

I am the maiden and the fear,
  I am the sunless shade, the strife,
I the demon lips, the sneer
  Showing under every life.

I must tread that gloomy way
  Until I shall dare to run
And bear the demon with his prey
  From the forest to the sun.

WASHED IN SILVER

Gleaming in silver are the hills,
  Blazing in silver is the sea,
And a silvery radiance spills
  Where the moon drives royally.
Clad in silver tissue I
March magnificently by.

THE VOICE OF GOD

I BENT again unto the ground
And I heard the quiet sound
Which the grasses make when they
Come up laughing from the clay.

"We are the voice of God," they said:
Thereupon I bent my head
Down again that I might see
If they truly spoke to me.

But around me everywhere
Grass and tree and mountain were
Thundering in mighty glee,
"We are the voice of deity."

And I leapt from where I lay,
I danced upon the laughing clay,
And, to the rock that sang beside,
"We are the voice of God," I cried.

THE CENTAURS

Playing upon the hill three centaurs were!
They lifted each a hoof and stared at me,
And stamped upon the dust.

They stamped the dust, they snuffed upon the air,
And all their movements had the fierce glee
Of power and pride and lust.

Of power and pride and lust! then with a shout
They tossed their heads and wheeled and galloped round
In furious brotherhood.

In furious brotherhood, around, about,
They charged, they swerved, they leaped; then, bound on bound,
They raced into the wood.

THE LARK

There is a small bird cowering in the dark;
His wing is broken, he will never sing;
He will not sing again, the little lark
That has a broken wing.

The lark that cowers with a broken wing
Is all alone; his mate has gone away;
To-morrow in the fields his mate will sing
Her merry lay.

His mate will sing again her merry lay
In the green fields, forgetting he is gone;
But he will never rouse a sunny day
Again for any one.

He will not sing again for any one;
The wing is broken of that little lark;
His song is broken, and his heart is gone
There in the dark.

THE SNARE

To A. E.

I HEAR a sudden cry of pain!
  There is a rabbit in a snare:
Now I hear the cry again,
  But I cannot tell from where.

But I cannot tell from where
  He is calling out for aid;
Crying on the frightened air,
  Making everything afraid.

Making everything afraid,
  Wrinkling up his little face,
As he cries again for aid;
  And I cannot find the place!

And I cannot find the place
  Where his paw is in the snare:
Little one! Oh, little one!
  I am searching everywhere.

THE CAGE

It tried to get from out the cage;
  Here and there it ran, and tried
  At the edges and the side,
In a busy, timid rage.

Trying yet to find the key
  Into freedom, trying yet,
  In a timid rage, to get
To its old tranquillity.

It did not know, it did not see,
  It did not turn an eye, or care
  That a man was watching there
While it raged so timidly.

It ran without a sound, it tried,
  In a busy, timid rage,
  To escape from out the cage
By the edges and the side.

BARBARIANS

I PAUSE beside the stream and hear
  The waters talking all the way;
If I had a proper ear
  I could tell you what they say.

The lovely tree against the sky,
  Which the first sun rests upon,
Has a message for my eye,
  If I had a proper one.

On the heath I met a wind,
  It whispered to me as I stood;
If I had a proper mind
  I could answer, so I could.

I am deaf and dumb and blind,
  No reply can I invent
When a stream, a tree, a wind
  Asks am I intelligent.

THE MASTERLESS MAN

Now it is my turn to sing
In the service of the spring;
I must lift a note and call
Bird and beast to madrigal.

But on mountain, peak, and shelf,
Over wood and plain and glade,
Spring is singing for herself,
She can do without my aid.

She can do without my aid!
So I need not sing to you:
Singing is my only trade!
What the deuce am I to do?

THE BUDS

I CAN see
The buds have come again
On every tree.

Through some dear intercourse of sun
and dew,
And thrilling root, and folding earth,
anew
They come in beauty.

They up to the sun,
As on a breast, are lifting every one
Their leaves.

Under the eaves
The sparrows are in hiding
Making love.

There is a chatter in the woods above,
Where the black crow
Is saying what his sweetheart wants
to know.

The sun is shining fair,
And the green is on the tree,
And the wind goes everywhere
Whispering so secretly;
You will die unless you do
Find a mate to whisper to.

GREEN BOUGHS

Birds were singing everywhere
  In the sunny spaces,
Blackbird, thrush, and linnet were
Flashing through the flashing air
  Full of airs and graces.

Up and down and round about,
  Soaring, gliding, swinging,
Darting in and scudding out,
While through all the pretty rout
  Came their frantic singing.

And upon the sunny view
  Happy trees were holding
Pretty baby leaves anew,
Freshly bathed in the dew,
  For the sun's beholding.

Loud he shouted through the plain
(Golden-voiced and glad he),
Dance them up with might and main,
Toss the baby leaves again
Till they see their daddy.

AS EVENING FALLS

At eve the horse is freed of plough or wain,
And all things turn from labour unto rest;
The scattered sheep are gathering home again,
And every bird is winging to its nest;
And every beast goes to his den once more
By hedge or hill. Each mother is aware
That little feet
Have paused in field or street,
And she will hear a knocking at the door
And open it, and see her children there.

BLUE STARS AND GOLD

While walking through the trams
and cars
I chanced to look up at the sky,
And saw that it was full of stars.

So starry-sown that you could not,
With any care, have stuck a pin
Through any single vacant spot.

And some were shining furiously,
And some were big and some were
small,
But all were beautiful to see.

Blue stars and gold, a sky of grey,
The air between a velvet pall;
I could not take my eyes away.

And there I sang this little psalm
Most awkwardly, because I was
Standing between a car and tram.

THE IMP

At the evening hour I bend
  In a reverential awe,
Day draws darkly to its end,
  In fulfilment of the law:
So I bow and make my peace,
  To the power of gloom I pray,
For he causeth day to cease
  By his universal Nay.

When the sun shines bright again
  And the day laughs to the sky,
When the distant hills are plain
  To the leaping of my eye;
Lust of life shall make me sin,
  Sin and laugh and dance and pray
To him who makes the day begin
  By his universal Yea.

Yea and nay and here and there,
  Back and forth, begin and end,
Joy and woe and foul and fair,
  Give and take and break and mend;
  These are words which I despise
Although at morn and eve I pray,
  Throwing dust into the eyes
Of the gods of Yea and Nay.

THE NODDING STARS

I

I THINK the stars do nod at me,
  But not when people are about,
For they regard me curiously
  Whenever I go out.

I may have been a star one day,
  One of the rebel host that fell,
And they are nodding down to say,
  "Come back to us from hell."

Perhaps they shout to one another
  "There he is!" or, "That is he!"
And tell it to some other mother
  Than the one that walloped me.

II

Brothers! what is it ye mean?
  What is it ye try to say?
That so earnestly ye lean
  From the spirit to the clay.

There are weary gulfs between
  Here and sunny Paradise,
Brothers! what is it ye mean
  That ye search with burning eyes

Down for me whose fire is clogged,
  Clamped in sullen earthy mould,
Battened down and fogged and bogged
  Where the clay is seven-fold?

III

If ye mean revolt, if ye
  Raise the standard, do not seek
Help or heartening from me,
  I am very, very weak;

My wings are clipped: the crown of
    gold
  Would not fit me now, my rage
Is as futile as the scold
  Of a linnet in a cage.

Do ye look to me for aid,
  O, my brothers far away?
I whom god and star betrayed
  When ye stamped me into clay!

O, my dears! I'm nodding, too,
  Hard as ever I can try,
Up and up and up to you,
  Where you nod upon the sky.

THE CROWN OF THORNS

A MAN had many sins, and he
Looked upon them pridefully,
  And thereof he made a crown
    Of thorns.

He made thereof a thorny crown,
  He pressed it down upon his brow,
  And he walks in triumph now.

And he walks in triumph now,
  Crowned without and crowned
      within,
  He has triumphed over sin.

He has triumphed over sin,
  He named it honour and renown,
  And thereof he made a crown
    Of thorns.

THE ANCIENT ELF

I AM the maker,
The builder, the breaker,
The eagle-winged helper,
The speedy forsaker.

I am the lyre,
The water, the fire,
The tooth of oppression,
The lips of desire.

The snare and the wing,
The honey, the sting;
When you seek for me look
For a different thing.

I, careless and gay,
Never mean what I say,
For my thoughts and my eyes
Look the opposite way.

THE KING OF THE FAIRY MEN

I KNOW the man without a soul:
He is happy as the day,
He is happy, people say.

He is happy — so they say:
But they do not see him roll
On the ground in very dole.

All along the ground in dole,
When no one is watching, he
Bites the ground in agony.

He bites the ground in agony:
But with people he is whole:
I know the man without a soul!

IRONY

THERE spake a man in days of old:
"I will believe that God can be
As kind and just as we are told
If he will throw down here to me
A bag of gold."

But when his wife rose from her bed
To see what kept her man away,
She found him with a broken head,
And on the ground beside him lay
A bag of lead.

THE FOUR OLD MEN

In the Café where I sit
The four old men who look like bards
Are playing at a game of cards;
And they are enjoying it.

They are so eager at their play,
They shout together joyously,
They laugh with all their voices, they
Are like the little boys you see
Playing in your nursery.

But they'd be angry, they would rave
And swear and take it quite amiss,
If you walked across and gave
Each a penny and a kiss.

WOMEN SHAPES

(*After Sappho*)

I COULD not see,
I looked but could not see!
  Down through the mists of twenty hundred years
I peered profound,
Where in a round
  Stood women shapes who mourned with bitter tears;
Dim mourners! what is it ye bend to see?
What is it that ye look upon so earnestly?

Will ye not move,
Will ye not move aside?
  O fluttering robe! O little foot of white

Pressing the grass!
Move that my eyes may pass
Into your mystic circle, to the sight
Of that ye gaze upon in mournful way,
As though upon the ground some piteous body lay.

The moon rose full,
The silver moon soared high
Upon the clouds, but still we could not see
What lay between
Those figures on the green,
And down the moon and I stared in a mystery;
For all the women stood, hushed, as in prayer
Around an altar when the god is there.

THE CLOUDS

I stood and looked around where, far
and nigh,
The heather bloom was swaying in
the air,
The clouds chased one another down
the sky
Beyond my sight, and everywhere
The birds flew through the sunshine,
where they sang
So loud, so clear, so sweet, the heavens
rang
Of lark and thrush and stare.

I never heard a melody so sweet
As I heard then ; I never knew a day

So filled with sunshine; never saw
the fleet
And tinted clouds so high and free
and gay;
Each danced to the horizon like a boy
Let out from school, each tumbled in
its joy
And ran away.

THIS WAY TO WINTER

Day by day
  The sun's broad beam
Fades away
  By a golden gleam;
Hark on the cliff
  How the sea-gulls scream.

Eve by eve
  The wind more drear
Stays to grieve
  That the winter's near;
Hark how the crisp leaves
  Dart and fleer!

Night by night
  The shade grows dense,

And the cold starlight
  Beams more intense;
Hark how the beggar boy
  Asks for pence!

Get you out
  Your muffler grey,
Your boots so stout,
  And your great-coat, pray,
And put on your gloves,
  'Tis a hardy day.

ETCHED IN FROST

The corn is down,
  The stooks are gone,
The fields are brown,
  And the early dawn
Grows slowly behind
  Where the mountains frown,
And a thin white sun
  Is shivering down.

There is not a leaf,
  Nor anything green,
To aid belief
  That summer has been;
And the puffed-up red-breast
  (Ball o' Grief)
Comes to the window
  For relief.

The cows are in byre,
The sheep in fold,
The mare and the sire
Are safe from cold,
The hens are sheltered,
In wood and wire,
And the sheep-dog snoozes
Before the fire.

The farmer can grin,
As he rubs his hands,
For the crops are in
From the resting lands;
And the wheat is stored
In the oaken bin,
And the farmer's wife
Makes merry within.

WHEN THE LEAVES FALL

When the leaves fall off the trees
  Everybody walks on them:
Once they had a time of ease
High above, and every breeze
  Used to stay and talk to them.

Then they were so debonair
  As they fluttered up and down;
Dancing in the sunny air,
Dancing without knowing there
  Was a gutter in the town.

Now they have no place at all!
  All the home that they can find
Is a gutter by a wall,
And the wind that waits their fall
  Is an apache of a wind.

IN GREEN WAYS

Among the leaves I make a rhyme,
To the winter in its pall,
For the poor, forgotten time
Has not had a song at all.

Winter! winter! do not fear,
You shall have an icy crown
At the falling of the year,
When the leaves have tumbled down.

I am singing to you here,
Though the bud is on the tree,
At the falling of the year
You will sing a song to me.

AT THE EDGE OF THE SEA

THERE was a river that rose
  In the cool of the morn,
It leaped down the side of the mountain,
  And ran through the meadows and corn,
But it came at the last to a cave
  By the edge of the sea,
And it fell through the darkness and vanished
  Forever from me.

I am sad for the river that fell
  Through the darkness away,
From the meadows and corn, from the sun,
  From the light of the day;

I could weep for the river that danced
In the light of the day,
And sank through the darkness and vanished
Forever away.

DARK WINGS

Sing while you may, O bird upon the tree!
Although on high, wide-winged above the day
Chill evening broadens to immensity;
Sing while you may.

On thee, wide-hovering too, intent to slay,
The hawk's slant pinion buoys him terribly:
Thus near the end is of thy happy lay.

The day and thou and miserable me
Dark wings shall cover up and hide away
Where no song stirs of bird or memory;
Sing while you may.

THE LIAR

Did you think, Old Grizzly-Face! to
frighten me?
To frighten me who fronted you
before
Times out of mind,
When, through that sudden door,
You took and bound and cast me to
the sea,
Far from my kind,
Far from all friendly hands — now I
Tremble no longer at your whisper,
at your lie.

I go with you, but only till the end
Of one small hour; and when the
hour is done
I shall again
Arise and leap and run

From the wind-swept, icy caves: I
shall ascend,
I shall attain
To the pearly sky and the open door
and the infinite sun,
And find again my comrades with me,
every one.

So, once more, here are my hands to
wind
Your cords about: here are my feet
to tie
Straitly and fast;
And here, on either eye,
Press your strong fingers until I am
blind:
Now, at the last,
Heave me upon your shoulder, whis-
pering sly,
As you so oft before have whispered,
your dark lie.

A day dawns surely when you will not dare
To come to me — then you will hide away
In your dark lands;
Then you will pray;
You will snarl and tremble when I seek you there
To bind your hands,
To whisper truth where you have whispered lies,
To press my mighty fingers down upon your eyes.

THE TRAMP'S DREAM

I saw this in a place at the world's
end,
When He was left alone without a
friend:

From every side, from far and near
they came,
The blind and battered and the lewd
and lame,
The frightened people, and the helpless
crew
Who hid in cellars, and the stragglers
who
Dodged here and there in corners of
the earth
Cursing the sun, and they who from
their birth

Were lapped in madness, raved, and strode along,
Chaunting in fury to a flighty song
Their holy wrath: and all the hungry folk,
Who through the world had rummaged, yelped, and broke
To a stiff run, for vengeance was in view,
And every one knew what he had to do.

It was the Judgment Day; and so they sped
(These vagabonds who always had been dead),
And packed their multitudes into the space
Between two stars: a deep and hollow place,
Rolling immense, a swirl of blue and grey
Steeped out of eye-shot: so it ever lay

Swinging in whispers, prickling to a sound,
Till the wind's whimper, rolling round and round,
Jolted to thunder, or the dreary sigh
Of a dead man drummed madness on the sky.

There they were silent, every awful stare,
With a dumb grin, was lifting anywhere;
When sudden He came stately, marching fleet,
From the red sun, with fire about His feet,
And flaming brow. And as He walked in fire,
Those million, million muzzles, lifted higher,
Stared at Him, grinned in fury, toned a yelp,
A vast malignant query, "*Did you help?*"

And at the sound the jangled spaces threw
Echo to echo, thunders bit and flew
Through deeper thunders, into such a bay
The Judge stood frightened, turned, and stole away.

THE ROAD

Because our lives are cowardly and sly,
Because we do not dare to take or give,
Because we scowl and pass each other by,
We do not live; we do not dare to live.

We dive, each man, into his secret house,
And bolt the door, and listen in affright,
Each timid man beside a timid spouse,
With timid children huddled out of sight.

Kissing in secret, fighting secretly!
We crawl and hide like vermin in a hole,
Under the bravery of sun and sky
We flash our meannesses of face and soul.

Let us go out and walk upon the road,
And quit for evermore the brick-built den,
The lock and key, the hidden, shy abode
That separates us from our fellow-men.

And by contagion of the sun we may
Catch at a spark from that primeval fire,
And learn that we are better than our clay,
And equal to the peaks of our desire.

A REPLY

To Ralph Hodgson

You have sent your verse to me
  And a poet must reply
To the gracious courtesy
  With whatever tune is nigh,
With whatever little air
Can be plucked from anywhere.

Verse has fled from me so long,
  I have quite forgot to sing;
I who had a hoard of song
  Now can scarce find anything
Worth the singing, though I grope
Less with fingers than with hope.

Singing at your highest tone:
  How shall I return the rhyme,
Whom the gods have left alone
  Such a very lengthy time?
So I veer and break and yaw
On my little pipe of straw.

II

Lift up my heart, and sing again
As once you did when I was young,
Before I knew of woe and pain,
When every happy bird that sung
I sang to it, and it to me
Repeated half the melody.

Like a thrush at peep of light,
I would pipe my sunny lay,
Singing how the blackest night
Always has to run away
When the sun climbs from afar
Brandishing his scimitar.

Like an eagle's is your cry;
More of fierceness than of glee,
Sent your pinions to the sky
Bounding our humanity;
Sent you winging to the sun
That is seen of every one.

III

You have climbed a hill, and I
  Climbed it too; we saw the sun
Toiling up his hill of sky,
  Shouting to the night to run
And hide itself before he came
With his scimitar of flame.

With his scimitar of heat,
  With his diadem of fire,
Lightning singing at his feet,
  Thunder chanting in the choir,
Twice ten thousand leagues of wind
Shouting victory behind.

You and I know well the hill,
  We have climbed it up and down,
Knowing what there is of ill,
  Knowing what it is to frown,
Lest the bitter word should be
On the lips of ecstasy.

IV

Still lift up my heart and sing
  Once again, as once you knew,
That the end of everything
  Is to build it up anew.
Are you sad, my heart? then keep
Singing, singing, lest you weep.

For whoever climbs that hill
  They shall feed on bitterness,
Wearying along until,
  At the very top of stress,
They shall eat their hearts and know
Joy is kernel of their woe.

They shall breathe a sweeter air,
  They shall see with other eyes
What they are and what they were,
  And the strange and sad disguise
Of humanity will slip
  From the shoulder and the lip.

V

Them the sun shall greet and call,
"Hail, and hail, and hail again,
Elder brothers of us all,
Who descended into pain;
Welcome to the thrones that ye
Sat in through eternity.

"Who descended to the heart,
Who descended to the hell,
Gathering every poisoned dart
Of pain and sorrow, hiding well
In their bosoms all they knew
Of the sin a god can do."

They shall climb the hell again,
They shall scale the heart anew,
Treading back without a stain
Through the sunlight and the dew,
From the rigour of the clay
To the thrones of yesterday.

THE HOLY TIME

The drowsy sun trod slowly to his rest;
He gathered all his dusty gold again
Away with him;
He only left a dim
Red colour on the sky, a ruddy stain
Scarce to be seen upon the quiet west:
So evening came, and darkness, and the sound
Of moving feet upon the whispering ground.

Like timid girls the shades went pacing down
The slopes of evening, trailing soberly
Their vestments grey;

Far, far away
The last red colour faded to a brown,
So very faint the eye could scarcely see:
And then the skirts of evening swung upon
That little distant light, and it was gone.

The bee sped home, the beetle's wing of horn
Went booming by, the darkness every side
Gathered around,
On air and sky and ground;
The pliant trees sang gently, far and wide,
In cadenced lift of leaves, a tale of morn;
And then the moon's white circle, faint and thin,
Looked steady on the earth — *there is no sin.*

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